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From the Conference Minister

by Rev. Kim Wood, Conference Minister

And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common.
Acts 2:43-44

My mind is on Hawai'i a lot these days. Not for my normal reasons, that dream I have of going to visit there someday, but because of the devastating fires that have stolen life and marred its beautiful face and rich heritage. I see the photos of friends who were there just days before, particularly those on Maui in the historic city of Lahaina. I can't help but compare them to the images coming across social media now, pictures of charred rubble and piled ruins. August 8, 2023, is a day that will sit in infamy in its part of the story of Hawai'i forever. I can't help but think, "What if it was my family, my people, my home?"



I have come to realize that those are dangerous thoughts and not ones reflective of our faith as Jesus' followers. As Luke the Evangelist wrote in the book of Acts, "And all who believed were together and had all things in common." This is my family. These are my people. We have ALL things in common. The tear-streaked faces, the broken hearts, the lifeless earthen vessels, the injured and maimed victims are my siblings...our siblings. It is too easy to compartmentalize them into a category of "other" or "elsewhere" and set them conveniently aside to receive them as a headline, but is that what Jesus has called us to do?

I realize that it can be overwhelming the many ways that tragedy and devastation strike at humanity. The natural disasters in our own Southeast

Conference, alone, are often more than we feel like we can handle: tornados and flooding and intense heat, just to name a few. And then there are the human-made assaults here and all over the world: inadequate infrastructures, especially in low-income and racially marginalized communities; system-thriving injustice and inequity; war; human trafficking, to name a few. And yet, “all who believed were together and had ALL things in common.”

This reminder of our connectedness, our common bond to all people is not an invitation to wallow in the grief of our siblings and their local communities. Wallowing will do them no good, it will do us no good. Grieve, yes, for their grief is our grief, but they do not need us to be stuck on their behalf. Instead, I urge you to lean their current reality, connect at the touchpoints available to you, and respond. In the case of the fires on the island of Maui, here are things you can do:

- Give, as you are able, to the United Church of Christ Wider Church Ministries special appeal at <https://support.ucc.org/hawaii-wildfires>
- To learn more, read the article at <https://www.ucc.org/amid-wildfires-devastation-ucc-makes-appeal-for-hawaii/>
- Connect with friends, family, and colleagues on the islands
- Pray

I also encourage you to become or stay aware of the communities in our own conference that are in varied stages of response and recovery from disasters. Find ways to support efforts in those areas, whether it be working with groups in hands-on projects, providing financial support, or creating a project through your local church to gather clean-up kits, toiletry kits, food and water, or other needs as posted. Financial gifts can be sent to the Southeast Conference Disaster Ministry through our online donation button on our website or directly to the SECUCC offices. Please be sure to note the purpose of your gift.

God has created us as one people. Our siblings' pains and sufferings are our pains and sufferings, just as their joys are ours to share. May Jesus guide us as we care for one another, pray for one another, love one another.

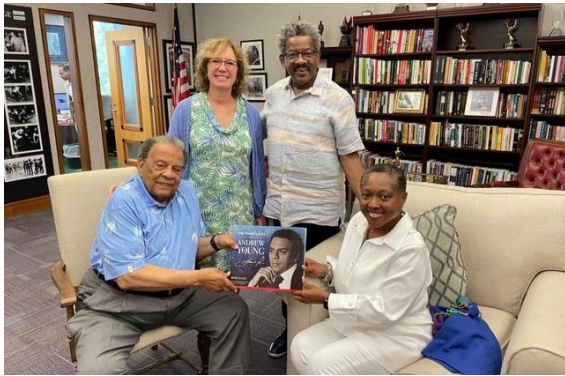
News from the Conference Office

Hangin' Out with the New UCC GMP

The new General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ, Rev. Dr. Karen Georgia A. Thompson, gathered with folks from the Southeast Conference during a visit to the Atlanta area on August 14 and 15, 2023. On that Monday evening, Rev. Dr. Thompson was welcomed by lay leaders, Members in Discernment (MIDs), and clergy during a reception at Central Congregational Church, UCC. The following morning, Rev. Dr. Thompson met with clergy and MIDs at Kirkwood UCC, both on-site and on Zoom, for a time of conversation and visioning. Rev. Dr. Thompson and Conference Minister Rev. Kim Wood then visited the Andrew Young Foundation, where they were graciously received by Ambassador Rev. Andrew Young and his team. Afterward, they headed to Piedmont University, one of our UCC-related universities, where GMP Rev. Dr. Thompson delivered the message during the Opening Convocation.

Thank you to the staff and leadership teams at Central Congregational Church and Kirkwood UCC for making it possible for the SECUCC to have these times of connection with our new General Minister and President. Thank you, Rev. Dr. Young and Rev. Dr. Dwight Andrews, for the delightful conversation that promises to build new ties with the wider UCC. And thank you, Piedmont University President, Marshall Criser III, and Campus Minister, Rev. Tim Garvin-Leighton, for your warm hospitality during our time in Demorest, GA!

And thank you, Rev. Dr. Karen Georgia, for hangin' out with the Southeast Conference in Atlanta, GA. We are grateful for your leadership and are excited to partner with you in the ministry of the United Church of Christ. And we look forward to having you with us as our keynote speaker at our next Annual Meeting, to be held August 16-17, 2024 at Fairfield Glade Community Church in Fairfield Glade, TN!



Where's the Conference Staff?

Can you believe we're more than halfway through August? Here's an update on a few places we've been hanging out and where you can look for us over the coming months. Maybe you'll find yourself in the area and take some time to "find" us. Or perhaps you might see an open date and consider inviting us to visit your local church or ministry setting.

Recently

- August 5-6 – Rev. Wood gathered with **Pilgrim Church UCC** in Birmingham, AL, for festivities and worship as they celebrated their 120th Anniversary. Rev. Wood also visited with **Covenant Community Church** in Birmingham that same day. Rev. Fosburgh joined **Forgiving Heart UCC** in Columbus GA, for their worship.
- August 13 – Rev. Wood worshipped with **First United Church, UCC in Belvidere, TN** on the occasion of their 150th Anniversary celebration (*see article below*). Rev. Fosburgh worshiped with **Open Table UCC** in Mobile as they celebrated the ministry of Pastor Josh Noah as he departed to accept a call as a chaplain.
- August 14-15 – Revs. Wood and Fosburgh hosted gathering opportunities with **Rev. Dr. Karen Georgia Thompson**, General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ while she visited the Atlanta area (*see article below*).
- August 15 – Rev. Wood attended Opening Convocation at **Piedmont University**.
- August 20 – Rev. Fosburgh preached at the **United Church in Huntsville, AL**.

Looking Ahead

- August 26 – Revs. Fosburgh and Wood will join the Commission on Ministry and Virginia Highland Church as we **ordain Candace Rowell**.
- September 16 – Rev. Wood will be the guest speaker at the Nashville UCC churches' **Upper Room UCC Fellowship** at Brookmeade Congregational Church.
- October 8-11 – Rev. Wood will be at the **Retired Servants Retreat**, held in partnership annually with the Southern Conference, UCC at Blowing Rock Conference Center in Blowing Rock, NC.
- October 19-22 – Rev. Wood will attend the United Church of Christ Board Meeting and the **Service of Installation of Rev. Dr. Karen Georgia Thompson** as General Minister and President of the UCC, both to be held in Cleveland, OH.

- November 2-6 – Rev. Wood Vacation (tent.)
- November 28-Dec 1 – Rev. Fosburgh will be meeting with the **Alliance of Conference Ministers** in Arizona.
- December 11-15 – Rev. Wood to attend the **UCC Council of Conference Ministers Annual Retreat** in Tuscon, AZ.



Photos from Kim Wood's visit to the Covenant Community Church in Birmingham

Ordination of Candace Rowell

The Commission on Ministry and Virginia Highland Church invite you to join us on August 26, 2023 at 6 pm Eastern for the Ordination of Candace Rowell. The service will also be streamed on Virginia Highland's YouTube and Facebook pages. All clergy are invited to wear stoles (red) for the service; we will not be wearing robes. Candace has been called as the Pastor of Faith Formation for Virginia Highland Church.

Candace Rowell was born and raised in Southeast Georgia. She and her family moved to Atlanta in 2015 and have been attending Virginia Highland Church since 2016. Candace has a background in public health with a Master of Public Health degree from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor and has worked in community health development globally since 2010. Candace graduated with a Master's in Divinity degree from Columbia Theological Seminary, Decatur in 2021 and has been working in hospital chaplaincy since. As well as serving on Virginia Highland Church's staff as part-time Pastor of Faith Formation Candace is also working as a part-time staff chaplain at Grady Memorial Hospital in Atlanta.

Candace is dedicated to creating diverse and inclusive micro and macro spaces of belonging and community. As a hospital chaplain and as a church minister, Candace embraces an embodied spirituality of questions and exploration. Her areas of emphasis include trauma-informed care, spiritual

trauma care, crisis care, mindfulness and embodiment, proclamation, justice and advocacy, and community building.



Prayer List

We are continuing the process of praying for authorized ministers, congregations, and ministry groups throughout 2023. We encourage you to include these prayer requests in your local church newsletter, share them with your prayer circle, and include them in your own prayers.

Week of August 20

- Pilgrim UCC; Birmingham, Alabama
- Walter Brueggemann
- Patricia Robbennolt
- Ralph Thompson

Week of August 27

- Fairfield Glade Community Church; Fairfield Glade, Tennessee
- Peggy Harrell
- Reginald Holloway
- Cameron Trimble

Churches in Transition

First Congregational, Savannah GA; Trinity Congregational, Athens AL; Holy Trinity Community Church, Nashville TN; Deer Lodge Congregational Church, Deer Lodge TN; Brookmeade Congregational, Nashville TN; Rush Memorial, Atlanta GA; First Congregational Christian, Montgomery AL; Open

Table UCC, Mobile AL; Howard Congregational, Nashville TN; Community Congregational, Montgomery AL.

News from our Local Churches

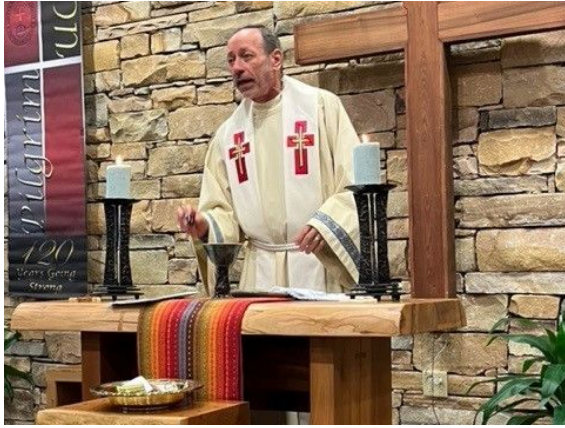
Pilgrim Church Birmingham Celebrates 120th Anniversary

by Rev. Paul Eknes-Tucker, Senior Pastor

The people of Pilgrim Church UCC in Birmingham, AL gathered in celebration and worship to mark the chartering of Pilgrim Church on August 3, 1903. Organized as Pilgrim Congregational Church, the last 120 years have seen remarkable changes and challenges for our congregation and the world around us. Our celebration kicked off on Saturday evening with a Garden Party on the church grounds. We brought in the "Hit! Direction" food truck where attendees could order food from a delicious menu. The crowd was entertained by the "Random Mountain Ramblers" whose delightful bluegrass music kept our toes tapping and our hands clapping.

On Sunday morning, a full house gathered in worship to hear guest preacher, Rev. Kim Wood, Southeast Conference minister, preach a wonderful message from Matthew's account of the feeding of the 5,000. We celebrated that indeed there is, "Plenty More" blessings, experiences and challenges as we mark this important milestone toward the congregation's next adventure. Pilgrim was joined by dear friends from Covenant Community Church UCC, First Congregational UCC and Beloved Community UCC.

We invite you to Pilgrim's Facebook page ([Facebook](#)) to view the worship service and to see a slide show from the Garden Party.



First United Church of Belvidere Celebrates 150 Years

First United Church, UCC of Belvidere, Tennessee celebrated 150 years of ministry Sunday, August 13, 2023. The congregation gathered with friends, family, and previous pastors during its annual Homecoming Event. Worship was led by First United Church's new pastor, Rev. Dr. Brian Byrne, (who also serves as pastor for United Church of Huntsville in Alabama), Rev. Dick Beck, Rev. Valerie Coe Lowder, Rev. Debbie Douglas, Rev. Jan Whiteman, and Rev. Karl Whiteman, with Rev. Kim Wood, Conference Minister for the Southeast Conference sharing the message. Worship was followed by one of First United Church's famous potluck dinners. Shortly after, those gathered returned to the Sanctuary for a concert and sing-along.

First United Church's 150th Anniversary was filled with many familiar faces and heartwarming memories. However, the highlight of this landmark Homecoming was the celebration of their present ministry in the community, which includes a focus on the rise in drug addiction in the area, and renewed energy as they seek to respond to God's call moving forward. Congratulations Belvidere First United Church, UCC!



Training Opportunities and Conferences



REGISTER TODAY

The SECUCC Stewardship and Finance Committee Invites YOU to a Valuable Webinar

The CGC Seminar for pastors and leaders offers an opportunity to explore faithful, practical, and tested ways to promote generosity in our congregations. Be sure to recruit at least a team of two for this program. Changing the culture of your congregation requires more than one dedicated leader.

- **Session 1: Generosity in Context** - learning more about what's happening in the broader landscape of giving, volunteering, religious attendance, and engagement.
- **Session 2: Theology of Money** - engaging with our tradition and examining the theology that shapes the approach our congregations take in addressing money and giving.
- **Session 3: Congregation** - identifying best practices which will enhance the congregation's capacity to function in a way that cultivates generosity.
- **Session 4: Leadership** - developing a more-generous congregational culture depends on strong leadership.
- **Session 5: Donors & Members** - exploring different motivations and perspectives on giving.
- **Session 6: Fundraising As Ministry** - creating an implementation plan specific to the congregation

This is a virtual seminar hosted by the South Central and Southeast Conferences on the following Mondays: Sept. 18, Oct. 2, Oct. 16, Oct. 30, Nov. 13, and Nov. 27 from 7:30pm – 9:00pm Eastern (6:30 – 8pm Central).

The registration fee is \$100 (per team of two) and \$50 for each additional team member. Please send additional questions to generosity@secucc.org.



Healthy Boundary Training for Retired Ministers, Active Clergy

Join Rev. Char Burch on Zoom for Retired Ministers Boundary Training. This training will be **from 1 pm to 4 pm Eastern on Wednesday, September 27**, and fulfills the Southeast Conference's Healthy Boundary Training Requirement for those Authorized Ministers who are retired but who are not Exempt. We welcome Retired Ministers from other Associations and Conferences but please check with your Conference/Association first to make sure they will accept our training for their requirement.

You can register here: <https://southeastconferenceunitedchurchofchrist-bloom.kindful.com/e/retired-boundary-training-online-offering>

If you are not a Retired Minister but need to take Healthy Boundaries Training this year, we still have room for our 101 course (anyone can take) **on November 2 and 3** on Zoom. You can learn more and register for these courses here: <https://www.secucc.org/news-and-events/healthy-boundaries-workshops/>

If you need to take Boundary Training this year, but our trainings do not fit in your schedule, you are welcome to take any training offered by another UCC Conference or Association. The courses we are aware of are listed on our website. <https://www.secucc.org/news-and-events/healthy-boundaries-workshops/>



Date: October 9-11 (with optional Sunday arrival)

Theme: The Church as it Was > Is > Could Be

Presenter: The Rev. Phiwa [pronounced PEE-wah] Langeni (D.Min.), who currently works at the Center for Analytics, Research & Development, and Data (CARDD) office as the UCC's first Ambassador for Innovation & Engagement.

Registration: Contact Jared Greer, Reservations Manager at Blowing Rock Conference Center @ jared@brccenter.org or by calling him at (828) 295-7813.

More Details: <https://www.secucc.org/news-and-events/retired-ucc-servants-retreat/>



Winter Youth Retreat at Blowing Rock Conference

Center

Our friends from Alethea will be joining us for a weekend of storytelling, experiential education, service, and of course fun in the snow on January 12-15, 2024. Registration is now open! Join youth from across the Southeast for a fun experience designed to fuel their faith.

Group Leaders, please [click here to register your full group](#).

Registration is open until December 1, 2023, and is \$208.00 per participant. (Includes lodging, programming, and meals.)

From the National Setting

Gathering of Educational Clergy and Chaplains

Tuesday, August 22, 4:00-5:30 pm ET

Join Rev. Anissa Glaser-Bacon, Minister for Ministers in Specialized Settings for an open-ended conversation about the present and future support needs for Educational Clergy and Chaplains in the United Church of Christ. This meet-up is intended for those serving as chaplains in educational settings. [Register for the Zoom meeting](#).

Conference Calendar

August 22 @ 9:30 am - 11:00 am EDT

[Zoom Conversation for Specialized Ministers](#)

August 22 @ 11:00 am - 12:00 pm EDT

[Clergy Conversations via Zoom](#)

August 26 @ 6:00 pm - 7:00 pm EDT

[Ordination of Candace Rowell](#)

August 29 @ 11:00 am - 12:00 pm EDT

[Clergy Conversations via Zoom](#)

September 5 - All Day

[Registration Deadline for Cultivating Generous Congregations Seminar](#)

View the full calendar of events online: <https://www.secucc.org/events/>

Contact Us

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Assoc. Conf. Minister: **Rev. Heather Fosburgh;** hfosburgh@secucc.org

Generosity Coordinator: **Min. Carrole Moss;** cmoss@secucc.org

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